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SIPDIS

EUR/RPM FOR SHINAGEL
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SUBJECT: MFA ON NATO VISIT TO CAIRO, EGYPTIAN VIEWS OF NATO

REF: BERNs-SHINAGEL E-MAIL 6/23

Classified By: ECPO Mincouns William R. Stewart per 1.4 (b).

11. (C) Summary: MFA Deputy Director for European Security and Strategy Mohammed Orfi briefed us July 8 on NATO Assistant SYG Martin Erdmann's mid-June meeting with MFA Assistant Minister for Europe Fatima Zara (ref), saying that the two sides moved toward signing an MOU on exchanging classified information that would enable Egypt to attend additional NATO training sessions. Orfi noted that Zara advised Erdmann against NATO playing a role in Israeli-Palestinian issues. Orfi provided us an overview of Egyptian-NATO relations, explaining that GOE cooperation is very controversial with the Egyptian public because of a perception that NATO targeted Islam as its "new enemy" after Communism's collapse. Orfi also noted the Egyptian public sensitivities to Israel's membership along with the GOE in NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue. Therefore, Orfi asserted, the GOE needs to show tangible benefits from its relationship with NATO. Arab League (AL) Chief of Staff Hisham Youssef told us July 13 that following Erdmann's June visit, the AL sent Erdmann a letter proposing a follow-up visit of AL officials to Brussels to discuss Sudan, Somalia and WMD. End summary.

Readout of A/SYG Erdmann's MFA Meeting

12. (C) MFA Deputy Director for European Security and Strategy Mohammed Orfi briefed us July 8 on NATO Assistant SYG Erdmann's meeting with MFA Assistant Minister for European Affairs Ambassador Fatima Zara during Erdmann's June 16-19 visit to Cairo where he met with MFA, MOD and Arab League officials. Orfi said that Zara and Erdmann agreed to move forward toward signing an MOU on exchanging classified information that will help Egypt participate in additional NATO training activities. He noted that the MOU covers regulations for safeguarding classified information, and is not controversial within the GOE.

13. (C) Orfi noted that A/Minister Zara advised Erdmann that NATO should not attempt to play a role in Israeli-Palestinian issues, and that the idea of a NATO peacekeeping force in the Palestinian territories would not be acceptable to the GOE. (Note: Other senior GOE interlocutors have called the idea of an international force "premature," but have not explicitly ruled it out as a future possibility. End note.) Orfi said Zara recommended that Erdmann engage quietly and discreetly with the Arab League. According to Orfi, Zara and

Erdmann discussed increasing NATO funding from 80 percent to 90 percent for GOE travel to Brussels to participate in training activities. Orfi acknowledged that the GOE is interested in this increase because of current budgetary difficulties.

¶4. (C) Orfi told us Zara stressed that the GOE believes only official government representatives should attend Mediterranean Dialogue Atlantic Policy Advisory Group (APAG) sessions. He said the GOE views the participation of NGOs in such sessions as premature, and thinks that the Mediterranean Dialogue is not developed enough to be opened up to civil society. Zara also lobbied for NATO to hold APAG sessions in NATO capitals, away from the tensions of the Middle East.

Overview of Egyptian-NATO Relations

¶5. (C) Orfi provided us with an overview of Egyptian-NATO relations, stressing that Egyptian cooperation with NATO is very controversial in the eyes of the Egyptian public and Egyptian opinion-makers. He said that journalists, academics and the general Egyptian public are suspicious of NATO because of a perception that NATO targeted Islam as "its new enemy" after the collapse of Communism. Orfi stressed that the Egyptian public is also sensitive to Egyptian participation in the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) because of Israel's membership. He noted that the Egyptian public views this joint Egyptian-Israeli participation as tantamount to military normalization, which he described as a highly

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inflammatory notion in Egypt. Therefore, Orfi continued, the GOE needs to show tangible results from cooperation with NATO to offset these political sensitivities. He added that the GOE tries to limit its public statements about NATO cooperation because of the political controversy. Orfi specified the Egyptian MOD and EGIS as particularly resistant to cooperation with NATO. (Note: EGIS cooperates with NATO member country intelligence services to different degrees. End note.)

¶6. (C) Orfi told us that the GOE recognizes NATO is able to provide effective counterterrorism training and assistance, but expressed an interest in receiving more "tangible" aid from NATO. Orfi cited de-mining as an area where the GOE would be interested in funds and equipment from NATO to clear the western desert so the area could support increased tourism. He acknowledged that NATO had offered expertise and training. Regarding the NATO mission in Afghanistan, Orfi suggested that increased NATO public relations efforts in the region to explain NATO's activities would be useful. Orfi stressed that Egypt opposes any attempts to integrate the Mediterranean Dialogue with NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) for the Gulf, explaining that Egypt and the Gulf Cooperation Council states who are ICI members have different security concerns. Orfi also asserted that the Gulf states are not interested in a relationship with the Mediterranean Dialogue because of Israel's membership.

Arab League COS on Follow-Up from Erdmann's Visit

¶7. (C) Arab League (AL) Chief of Staff Hisham Youssef told us July 13 that subsequent to NATO A/SYG Erdmann's meetings with the AL in June, Youssef had written to NATO offering to send AL Deputy SYG Bin Helli to Brussels for follow-up meetings. Youssef said that after Bin Helli's visit, the AL would be interested in sending 2-3 officials to Brussels to discuss Sudan, Somalia, WMD, and other issues NATO might suggest. Youssef stressed that the AL wants all of this engagement to be "low key."
SCOBAY